Nixon's Nov. 3 Speech A Blueprint for Protracted War, Pps. 1-4

A New "Stab In The Back" Myth To Excuse Military-Political Incompetence

Let us be united for peace. Let us also be united against defeat. Because let us understand: North Vietnam cannot defeat or humiliate the United States. Only other Americans can do that. *—Nixon's address on Vietnam, Nov. 3.*

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The Old Nixon Surfaces Again

I

No Communist regime ever rewrote history more blatantly than Richard Nixon in his Nov. 3 speech on Vietnam. He asked, "why and how did the U.S. become involved in Vietnam in the first place?" His answer was that 15 years ago North Vietnam, with the support of Communist China and the Soviet Union, "launched a campaign to impose a Communist government on South Vietnam, by instigating and supporting a revolution." It was then, he went on, that Eisenhower "sent economic aid and military equipment." The truth is that 15 years ago Nixon was doing his best to prevent peace from breaking out in Vietnam and he failed because Eisenhower would not support him.

This has been Nixon's war for a long, long time.

Nixon's Secret War Speech

In 1954, as the opening of the Geneva Conference in Indochina drew near, Nixon tried to drum up support for American armed intervention. But, characteristically, he also tried to keep the public from knowing what he was up to. The newspapers of April 17, 1954, carried blaring headlines over a story that "a high Administration spokesman" in an off-the-record question and answer session the day before with the Society of Newspaper Editors in Washington, had said "if to avoid further Communist expansion in Asia and Indochina, we must take the risk now by putting our boys in, I think the Executive has to take the politically unpopular decision and do it." The news leaked within 24 hours from Paris that the speaker was Vice President Nixon.

In the second volume of his memoirs, *Mandate for Change,* Eisenhower recalled that at a press conference after the Nixon speech had leaked out, Eisenhower said, "there was no plausible reason for the United States to intervene" and added—and this must have seemed to Nixon the most cutting comment of all—"we could not even be sure that the Vietnamese population wanted us to do so." Nixon said freedom was at stake in Indochina. "It was almost impossible," was Eisenhower's reaction, "to make the average Vietnamese peasant realize that the French, under whose rule his people had lived for some 80 years, were really fighting in the cause of freedom, while the Vietminh [as the Communist-led rebels were then known], people of their own ethnic origins, were fighting on the side of slavery." Then Eisenhower added that famous remark, "It was generally conceded that had an election been held, Ho Chi Minh would have been elected President."

The origins of the war lay in the efforts made by Nixon and others like him to prevent any such election from being held. Fifteen years ago all the great Powers including Communist China and the Soviet Union but not the United States, agreed to guarantee an armistice based on temporary division of the country with elections on reunification to be held two years later. Under pressure from hawks like Nixon, John Foster Dulles and Admiral Radford, Eisenhower laid the seeds of future trouble by setting up the Diem regime in the South and encouraging it to refuse elections two years later. But Ike did resist American intervention. At a White House conference on whether to intervene rather than accept the Geneva settlement, Eisenhower observed "that if the U.S. were unilaterally, to permit its forces to be drawn into conflict in Indochina and in a succession of Asian wars, the end result would be to drain off our resources and to weaken our overall defense situation." That is exactly what the Vietnamese war has done, and what its continuation under Nixon will continue to do.

The Bitter Medicine The U.S. Must Swallow

Deliberate, orderly but complete withdrawal has become in my judgment the only practical course open to the United States if we are to restore our foreign policy to coherence, regain our psychological balance, alleviate the deep-seated strife in our society, and reorder our national priorities in ways that will win the support of a large majority of our own people . . . In particular there can be no real truce between the generations . . . until Vietnam is terminated . . . If we can forthrightly acknowledge the basic, unpalatable truth—that our intervention in 1965 was misconceived, that viewed through cold, clear eyes it could not be justified on the grounds that vital national interest was at stake—then we can bite the bullet in Vietnam. We can acknowledge past failure and the inevitability of some degree of defeat . . . as a means of liquidating an enterprise that is beyond retrieval and a condition that is poisoning the bloodstream of our society.

—pps. 236-8, The Limits of Intervention *by Townsend Hoopes, Under Secretary of the Air Force (1967-69) an insider's account of the revolt in the Establishment which forced LBJ to stop bombing the North.*

II

Those who say there was nothing new in the Nixon speech are badly mistaken. Never before has he disclosed how committed he is emotionally and ideologically to this war. It may be ludicrous but it is revealing that he wrapped himself in

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the mantle of Woodrow Wilson, and said that Vietnam if not another "war to end wars", *was* a war to bring closer Wilson's "goal of a just and lasting peace." But Wilson thought this goal could only be achieved through a League of Nations, in a disarmed world, not in a *Pax Americana*. It was sheer self-satire for Nixon to present himself as Wilson, thus casting tiny Vietnam in the role of imperial Germany seeking—and almost achieving—world dominion. Those final tremolo passages of his speech sounded like a *put on* drafted by Russell Baker. There was also the exaggeration on which humor feeds in his new version of the domino theory. If we went down to defeat in Vietnam, the dominoes would fall "in the Middle East, in Berlin, eventually even in the Western Hemisphere." Only a few days earlier in an anemic Latin American message, Nixon said the U.S. was no longer concerned with free institutions south of the border. Now we were told that in fighting for "freedom" in Vietnam we were also safeguarding it in Latin America!

A Threat To Re-Escalate

If the war is so crucial to the whole planet, how can we ever withdraw without victory? Nixon made plain that he did not intend to do so. He indicated that our troops would stay as long as necessary to keep the Thieu-Ky regime firmly in power. The enemy was put on notice that it must "fade away" and accept a political-military defeat or face re-escalation of the American effort, perhaps also a resumption of the bombing. This is why there is no time-table for withdrawal.

Now as in 1954 Nixon claims only to be defending South Vietnam's right to self-determination. Two days before he spoke an event took place which showed how hollow this claim was and is. At the South Vietnamese embassy here in Washington, as in Saigon and among the exiles in Paris, South Vietnamese everywhere celebrated Nov. 1 as their "National Day." Few Americans are aware that National Day commemorates the overthrow of Ngo Dinh Diem. His nine years of repression and corruption sparked the rebellion, and his overthrow was so popular that the date has been marked ever since as a day of deliverance. Diem was our first experiment in the "Vietnamization" Nixon offers as if it were a new panacea. The more military and economic aid we poured into Vietnam, the fiercer the rebellion grew. In 1965 Johnson finally had to "un-Vietnamize" the war and take over combat directly lest the Saigon regime collapse and a peace Cabinet take over. There is little reason to believe that Vietnamization will be any more successful with Thieu and Ky. Their regime is as unrepresentative as Diem's. What could be more impudent (to borrow an Agnewism) than to support dictators in the name of self-determination?

The real temper of the South Vietnamese may be gathered from what happened on National Day in Saigon and Paris. In Saigon, Thieu marked the occasion with an amnesty. But he was afraid to free Truong Dinh Dzu, who polled the second highest vote in the Presidential election as a peace candidate. Senator Tran Van Don, the man who led the coup which overthrew Diem, addressed a meeting in Saigon, proposing a neutralist policy and an end to "fracticidal strife." The AP reported that "almost every influential group in South Vietnam was represented at the meeting." General "Big" Minh, whose popularity Thieu feared so much he

On The Blood Bath Myth

Hong Kong—**In contrast to the apocalyptic view of the future currently being voiced in some quarters in the United States, specialists in this part of the world strongly doubt that an American withdrawal will give the Communists an automatic victory in South Vietnam. Even if the Communists do acquire a share of power in Saigon, these specialists submit, it is equally doubtful that they could or would slaughter everyone who resists their authority.**

This is not to depict the Communists as Boy Scouts dedicated to good deeds. Nor does it mean that their ultimate goal is anything less than the complete control of Vietnam. Yet they, like their opponents, cannot realistically ignore the fact that Vietnam is a highly fragmented, pluralistic society that can only be governed by balancing rather than crushing its vast and often baffling assortment of factions. . . .

Indeed, the Vietcong itself is not a monolith but, as its formal title proclaims, a "front" comprising representatives of Vietnam's diverse factions—stiffened and directed, of course, by the Communists. Accordingly, the American expert Douglas Pike suggests that postwar Vietnam could conceivably resemble a federation like Switzerland with the country's variegated groups maintaining their regional strongholds while participating in a central coalition government.

—Stanley Karnow, Washington Post, *Nov. 3. A similar view was expressed by former ambassador Averell Harriman on ABC television the same night.*

Secret U.S. Combat Evaluation Finds South Vietnamese Army Declining

Saigon — The latest official American evaluation of South Vietnamese fighting ability rates the combat effectiveness of government troops in the second quarter of 1969 as slightly lower than it was in the same period a year ago. The evaluation also says that the South Vietnamese 7th Division became persistently less effective in combat during each of the three quarters preceding the time when it was assigned to replace troops of the 9th American Division as they left Kien Hoa and Dinh Tuong provinces in the Mekong Delta.

This unpublished but official American view that the Vietnamese actually lost combat effectiveness since last year forms a contrast to the glowingly optimistic public statements and "background" evaluations offered to reporters by high American advisers to many Vietnamese units. . . . The evaluations are prepared by American officials periodically, based both on personal assessments by American advisers who work in the field with South Vietnamese troops and on elaborate sets of statistical criteria. They are given "confidential" classifications which are not normally available to the press. . . .

One of the recurring themes is the official American view that Vietnamese troops "lack aggressiveness" when actually facing the enemy in combat. This theme, which is applied to most major units, is carried further in references to one unit which was deeply involved in the battles of Dak To and Ben Het during the period covered. That unit dropped from the second-highest combat rating in South Vietnam to the third from the bottom during the period on which the official estimate is based. During a relatively quiet period the unit had worked its desertion rate down to a relatively low level by South Vietnamese Army standards, but during the period included in the evaluation, the unit's desertion rate soared to more than three times what it had been.

—John E. Woodruff in the Baltimore Sun, Oct. 29.

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barred him from the Presidential election, seconded Tran Van Don and called for "a people's Congress" (*London Times,* Nov. 3) to replace the present regime. In Paris a group of exiles representing many different currents of South Vietnamese politics signed a National Day manifesto (*Le Monde,* Nov. 1) calling for peace, independence and neutrality. "It is only by a broad union of forces," their appeal said, "that we can clearly show the government of the United States that for Vietnamese patriots the card of anti-Communism long ago lost its significance in the face of the suffering without limit of the South Vietnamese population under American bombardment." That is the silent majority for peace Thieu is suppressing with the arms we give him in the name of "Vietnamization." What if the opposition tries to overthrow him as it did Diem? Do we step in? How far does Nixon's blank check to Thieu extend?

III

Nixon's effort to get the U.S. to intervene 15 years ago shows him as little concerned with "self-determination" at home as in Saigon. Eisenhower had just been elected on an implied promise to end the war in Korea. The country wanted no more land wars in Asia. Korea had been our first defeat; ill-armed Chinese "volunteers" had pushed us back from the Yalu all the way to the 38th Parallel despite our air supremacy. The acceptance of that defeat in the Korean armistice was nevertheless immensely popular. Yet within a few months Nixon asked Eisenhower to lead the U.S. into another Korea in Vietnam.

Silent Maybe But A Majority?

Nixon claims to talk for a silent majority now.* He knew he spoke for no majority then. To take the country into another Asian war so soon after peace had been made in Korea would have precipitated a crisis of confidence easily as great as the current one. *Repression against opponents of the war might very likely have been necessary.* Nixon had the requisite mentality for it. His "twenty years of treason" campaign against the Democrats in 1953 was dirtier than Joe McCarthy. With Mundt, over the almost universal objections of the American bar, Nixon had fathered the Mundt-Nixon Internal Security Act a few years earlier. For the first time in the history of a free society, it set up a Subversive Activities Control Board as an instrument—Truman said in his unsuccessful veto message—of "thought control." It is not difficult to envisage the kind of campaign Nixon would have waged against opponents of a Vietnamese war then or the kind he may be preparing to wage now.

Agnew, as McCarthy said on "Issues and Answers" Nov. 2

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From A Combat Soldier In Vietnam

Dear Sir—Perhaps I can help clear up the mystery of the "end of search-and-destroy missions" (mentioned in the Oct. 20 Weekly, p. 2). The Cavalry's primary mission is search-and-destroy; this is no less true today than it was in July. However, about a month and a half ago we were visited in the field by some newsmen. Before their helicopter arrived we were instructed that if we should be asked what we were doing we should say, "We are on a reconnaissance-in-force for pacification purposes." Under no circumstances were we to call our mission "search and destroy." It seems that the army ended search-and-destroy missions by changing their name, just as for a while they were called "search and clear."

In our area of operations there was a lull for a while after the battle of Tay Ninh, presumably in order for the NVA to be supplied. The officers say that there are indications (e.g., captured documents, POWs, defectors) that the enemy really thought that they could take Tay Ninh and that their morale was extremely low. That only accounts for a small part of the country, however. Anyway, now the level of the fighting is about as high as it normally is at this time of year. I can assure you that search-and-destroy is what we do every day, though we don't call it that.

—*Letter From A Soldier In Vietnam, Oct. 25.*

* The majority may be silent but is it for continuation of the war until the other side accepts the Thieu-Ky regime? The Louis Harris poll in Time magazine Oct. 31 indicates this is doubtful. In a dual poll of "public" and "leaders" Harris found only 38% of the former and 31% of the latter favored slowing up withdrawals to save the Thieu-Ky regime, while 64% of the former and 74% of the latter favored replacement of the Thieu regime with one more representative of the South Vietnamese people. The broadest consensus (80 and 81% respectively) felt, unlike Nixon, that it was a mistake to get into the Vietnam war altogether.

Muskie's Reply to Agnew's Charge of Playing Russian Roulette on MIRV

BILL MONROE: You suggested that we ought to have a six-month ban on the testing of the MIRV weapons, the multiple warhead missiles that can put out several warheads, each of which can be guided to their own targets. Now that the SALT talks, the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks, have been announced to begin in about three weeks, do you still feel it would be a good idea if we would stop our own testing of the MIRV weapons?

SEN. MUSKIE: Yes, I do for these reasons. We're told that our own testing of the MIRV—let's call it a multiple warhead, a single missile that can discharge and target up to 13 nuclear warheads—will be completed by next May. Once we've completed our testing, the Russians obviously will feel they must complete theirs until they've developed the MIRV. Once this weapon is in both arsenals, we will have escalated the nuclear arms race to a new and more costly and more perilous plateau. We now have the capacity to destroy each other to the point where neither is likely to attack the other first. That kind of a stalemate can be maintained at the present level of armaments or at some higher one. It doesn't make sense to move to a higher plateau if we can avoid it.

Once we have completed our testing, then the possibility of reaching agreement on the use of this weapon is almost zero . . . I think that unilateral suspension of testing of multiple warheads by us now could be a useful initiative.

BILL MONROE: Commenting on this proposal by you, Vice President Agnew said no responsible person would play Russian roulette with American security.

SEN. MUSKIE: The development of ever more complex and costly nuclear weapons is itself a form of Russian roulette. What I'm trying to do is to stop that roulette wheel from turning. Let me point out that in 1963 we were able to achieve a nuclear test ban treaty with the Soviet Union because (and Mr. Khrushchev told Mr. Harriman this) in June of that year President Kennedy in a speech at American University announced unilateral suspension of tests in the atmosphere. By the end of that July we had an agreement with the Russians.

—*On the Today Show NBC, Oct. 29.*

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Agnew Talks of Peaceniks As Moscow Does of Dissident Writers

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is "Nixon's Nixon." Agnew takes the low road, as Nixon did under Eisenhower. If the Agnew speech at Harrisburg, Pa., Oct. 30 is read with Nixon's Nov. 3 speech, we can see a new campaign shaping up against the peace forces. Agnew spoke of "separating" the protest leaders "from our society —with no more regret than we should feel over discarding rotten apples from a barrel." That "rotten apple" remark is vintage authoritarianism. This is how Moscow hardliners talk of dissident writers. And how would Agnew separate them from the rest of us? By prison or concentration camp?

Nixon's Wicked Nonsense

Nixon chimed in with a similar theme when he said we had to unite for peace and unite against defeat because "North Vietnam cannot defeat or humiliate the United States. Only Americans can do that." This is first of all nonsense. North Vietnam *did* hand the U.S. a defeat and a humiliation in the eyes of the whole world by standing up to the most ferocious bombardment in history. It increased its infiltration and aid to the Southern rebels despite that bombardment and finally forced the U.S. to end it in order to bring the North and the NLF to the negotiating table. If any Americans did *that,* it was not the peaceniks but our military-intelligence bureaucracy which made one resounding mistake after another, and led us into a quagmire.

Nixon is picking up where the French military-intelligence bureaucracy broke off. They said the war was lost in Paris, not in Indochina, because the French grew sick of the war, and decided to negotiate instead. They grew sick of the war because they grew suspicious (as Americans have) of optimistic forecasts and repeated promises of victory. They began to realize that military force could not win a political war, and that the sooner defeat was accepted the better for France. Nixon hints as the French rightists did that if America loses it will be because of traitors at home. Those who oppose the war are thus cast as the real enemy. Thus dissent can be persecuted as treason.

There could be no blinder folly than such a course. "If," Agnew said at Harrisburg, Pa., "in challenging peace demonstrators we polarize the American people, I say it is time for a positive polarization." This is also the language of the most extreme factions in the anti-war movement. Like the abolitionists before the Civil War, they would rather tear the country apart than permit a moral wrong to go on. A wise leadership would avoid the adoption of the same strategy in reverse. Are Nixon and Agnew so obtuse that they do not see that opposition to the war has penetrated every class and every region in our country? Do they think they can get away with identifying dissent on the war with revolution and treason? Are they looking for a confrontation at home? Is this why, as this is written, news comes that the Justice Department has suddenly switched overnight and denied a parade permit to the Mobilization? Is Nixon about to do a Daley? *Nov. 5*

A Fast Man With A Non-Sequitur

Q. Mr. Vice President, let us take the bull by the horns. Isn't seizing upon this letter [the letter from North Vietnam to the Moratorium] a last-minute attempt to dampen down the moratorium by the administration?

A. Absolutely not. We didn't send the letter. The letter was sent by a foreign power seeking to divide the people of the United States. I would feel remiss in my duty as Vice President, and I am sure the President would feel remiss in his, if he didn't make the contents of this letter known with our reaction to it.

Q. Mr. Agnew, how does this differ from the usual propaganda efforts that are not unknown, such as this country's offering to rebuild North Vietnam, et cetera?

A. This Government has never addressed a communication to the citizens of an enemy power suggesting that they rebel against their own government.

Q. Have we not dropped leaflets from airplanes during time of war?

A. This is not a leaflet dropped from an airplane.

—From text of Agnew's press conference of Oct. 14 at p. 1421, Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents, Vol. 5, No. 42, Oct. 20.

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